

Pask Farms Ltd.

Box 40
Atwater, SK
S0A 0C0

Phone:
306-745-2571
Fax:
306-745-2564

**INSIDE
THIS
ISSUE:**

It's Always About The Weather	1
Alfalfa Seed Harvest	1
The SK Alfalfa Seed Crop Outlook	2
Alfalfa Seed Market Outlook	2
Can We Keep Growing Alfalfa Seed & Leafcutter Bees	3
Leafcutter Bees	3
Seed Prices	4

Pask Farms Ltd.

Fall Newsletter 2011

• craig@paskfarms.com

• murray@paskfarms.com

It's Always About the Weather

The hot summer days have helped mature a late and wet crop. This is exactly what was needed to get any pay back from the late seeding that was such a struggle. Things can change quickly. Now crop forecasters have pegged harvest ahead of the five year average. Our terrific run of hot September harvest weather has come to an end, with the frost on the night of September 13th. Southern and central areas recorded from zero to -6 degrees overnight. The forecast looks good again in the short term, but the late green seed we were waiting for is finished.

Back in 2010, most alfalfa seed growing areas in SK had record rainfall. We went into the fall very wet, had plenty of snow and started 2011 very saturated. The excess moisture areas in SK were almost a flip flop from 2010. Our area south of Yorkton was almost the divide for the past two years. North and west of us miraculously planted most of their acres in 2011, after forty plus inches of rain in 2010. South and east of us had a pretty good year in 2010, but had a wreck this year. Zero to 25% of the ground got planted from us south and east to the US border. Right in our area around 1/3 of the acres got seeded. At our yard over 17" of rain fell from May to September this year, about twice our average, and twice what is needed. The 6" in August was less than welcome. Our fields are still very wet.



"What was he thinking"

Alfalfa Seed Harvest

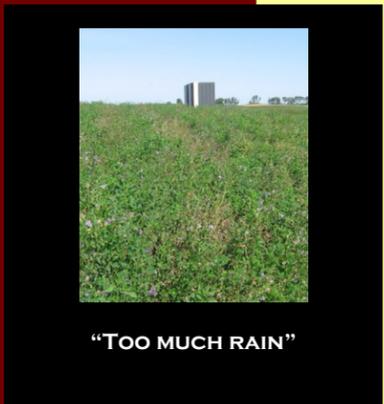


Desiccating Alfalfa

The widespread frost has ended any further alfalfa seed development. From now on, each day a bit more seed will fall off and the yield will be a bit less. The sooner we can get the crop into the bin, the better. Desiccation with Reglone has been our weapon of choice, provided we have a decent crop. Swathing can result in too much forking piles out of the bush, while waiting for more frost is too hard on the fingernails. The Reglone also stops the plant diseases from continuing to rot the plants. We're using .9L/acre of Reglone in 14 gal/acre, of water and it still takes 8 days+ before we can harvest.

PS – thanks to Wayne Goerzen for the tip on less expensive Reglone. That worked for us this year.

The Saskatchewan Alfalfa Seed Crop Outlook



“TOO MUCH RAIN”

Everyone struggled with their alfalfa trying to become a hay crop. I have talked with growers from MB, SK, and AB in the last week, and all have faced many challenges. Some worse than others, but none are short of water. Just when the crop was starting to stress a bit, along came more rain. The alfalfa flowered and bloomed into September. Alfalfa stands grew tall, lodged, and are now rotting. Most of the first seed set is either on the ground and is mush, or is barely hanging onto sickly looking

plants. The second growth has nice plump curls and seeds, but if they had no colour change before the frost they are toast. The wetter it is, the more the weeds love it. The soil residual chemi-

als were quickly leached away and the weeds filled in the gaps. Canada thistle is everywhere and is awful.

Yes, we were blessed with very warm temperatures right to mid September. But I bet I am not the only one saying I wish we could have had just one more week! Yields will be hurt a bit by this frost. My best yield guess for SK will be under 200 lbs/ac average. Some guys had real messes that will not hit 100 lbs/ac and others may hit 400-500 lbs/ac on ground where everything was right.

FALL
NEWSLETTER
2011

Alfalfa Seed Market Outlook

Not much alfalfa seed was traded over the summer. Common seed for 2011 – 2012 delivery has traded at levels that reflect a grower net price of \$1.65/pound or better, depending on the CDN\$/US\$ exchange rate. The market is in a wait and see mode. Buyers are



ALFALFA HARVESTING

waiting to see how the North American crop will finish up and sellers are in no rush to offer seed that they do not have. Alfalfa seed usage in North America continues to trend down, but inventories have been largely used up. The non

dormant varieties continue their roller coaster ride, as they are in short supply again, with high prices. The major inventory continues to be the Roundup

Ready alfalfa, as spring sales of this product seemed to be slower than expected.

Will the high USA hay prices translate into more planting of alfalfa and require more alfalfa seed? Some analysts feel that this market is stable at today's prices. There is concern that higher grower prices for forage seeds are essential to keep forage seed growers. High bee prices means the USA growers need a better seed price to pay for their leafcutter bees. There has been some activity in the USA looking for fall alfalfa seed plantings, resulting in phone calls checking on bee availability and prices.

Can We Keep Growing Alfalfa Seed &

Leafcutter Bees?

Canola at 40 bushels/acre with \$12/bu pricing makes it the crop of choice in Western Canada. Malt barley and high protein wheat aren't far behind. Is alfalfa seed – leafcutter bee production competitive at the current prices? This is a question we all ask ourselves. Our crop is high labor, high risk and high management. Commodity cropping is relatively easy, with significantly less risk, less labor and less intensive management.

If you cut the inputs on alfalfa seed such as weed control, disease control and harvest management, it reduces risk, but invariably results in lower yields. The wetter weather of the past few years has made alfalfa seed production more marginal in this new climate. Many growers have decided this isn't working and alfalfa seed acres have been cut way back in Saskatchewan. Bees prices are helping, but alfalfa seed prices and yields are falling behind. The answer to the question is in your yields. If your long term average is 250 lbs/acre and 2x bees, this is likely still working. Otherwise, we need to see some significant increases in seed prices, or our alfalfa seed acres in Saskatchewan will continue to decline. On our farm, one thing we appreciate is the improvement to the land we get from having alfalfa in our crop rotation. Our canola yield and wheat protein are significantly better on alfalfa ground, as compared to our fields that haven't grown alfalfa. There is more at work here than simply nitrogen levels. For us, the answer is YES, alfalfa seed will stay in our rotation. Our yields still make this more than competitive with canola on our farm.



Leafcutter Bees

Surprisingly, very few growers think their bees have done terrific. A few more growers tried seeding buckwheat to provide the bees with an alternate source of leaf pieces with some success. It seems the wet lush alfalfa, plus the intermittent weather has kept the bee increase down. Last year, one seed company spread the rumor that bees would be readily available at \$75. Naturally, that didn't did set the tone. It took a while before the returned, and cost all of us money. This you seem to have the \$100 figure firmly in pretty steep for the blueberry guys, so time canola industry and USA alfalfa seed guys the bees.



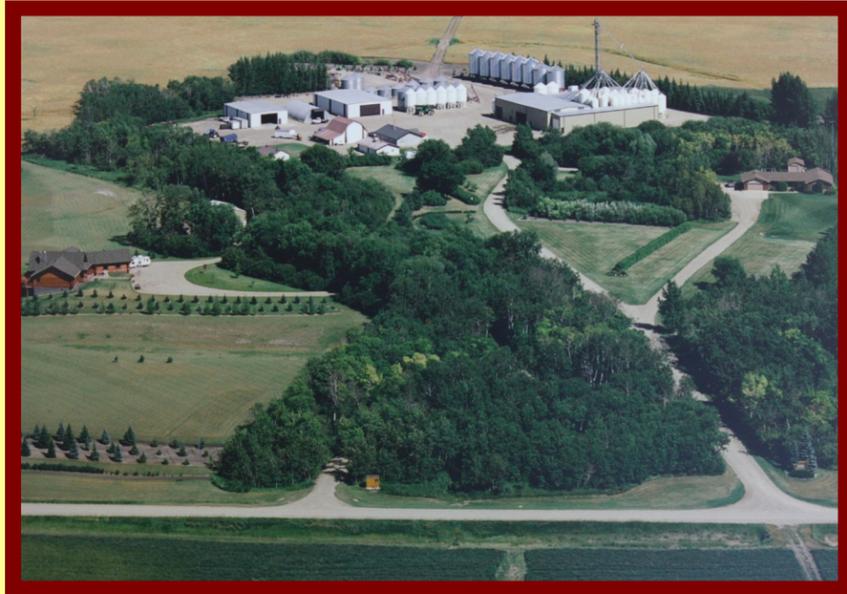
happen, but it \$90+ prices year, many of mind. This is will tell if the will eat up all

"If only all the nests were this good"

Pask Farms Ltd.

Box 40
Atwater, SK
S0A 0C0

Phone: 306-745-2571
Fax: 306-745-2564



Seed Prices

Whatever the prices, we need to see a representative sample of your seed, so we can give you a dockage estimate and quote you a net price. Please send us about a 1 kg sample. We do a test on 500 grams and keep the balance to compare with the seed you deliver. Naturally, we need samples and bushel/weight estimates on all the contract production you have for us. We have some space here, but we try and take delivery in accordance with our cleaning and shipping requirements.

Good Yields and Safe Harvest,

Craig Newton

Murray Pask

